

International with local roots

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Opening Academic Year; title “**International with local roots**”

Jo Ritzen, president Maastricht University

“Used to be the trouble maker
Hated home, I was a sweet heart-breaker
But now I have my dream
I’m so rowdy at eighteen”.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, this is the first verse of the lyrics of School Days of the movie Detroit Rock City, by the Runaways, an all female hard-metal rock band.

It is my way to welcome the new students, whether they are eighteen or younger or older, at our university, even though the worlds of Detroit Rock City and our university stand far apart as is evidenced by the sequel of Detroit Rock City.

“School days, school days
I am older now and what will I find but my
School days, school days
I am starting to ship, I am losing my mind”.

End of the quote from Detroit Rock City.

Let me reassure you: here in Maastricht to the contrary, we aim at an education which does not make you lose your mind, but rather, makes you find and develop your talents.

I welcome here the secondary school students who still have to make up their minds of what to do after graduation.

I welcome the seasoned Maastricht University students as well as the alumni.

It is a privilege to receive here today a sizeable group of citizens from the city of Maastricht.

We are delighted to have the company of Dutch parliamentarians and Dutch Euro parliamentarians, of the Governor (Queens commissioner) and the members of the Provincial Executive, of the Mayor of the city of Maastricht and some of the Alderman and many friends from the social and business community of this region.

I appreciate the presence of our German and Belgian friends. I welcome my colleagues of the academic and the support staff of the university.

We sadly then remember the active presence at this university of those who died in the past academic year, namely:

Our staff members:

Nelly Plompen

Piety van der Nagel

Nathalie Smeets

Marleen Hertoghs,

Co Greep, the unforgettable founding father of the Medical Faculty

Our students:

Reindert de Vries

Tarkan Dincelek

Harald Verhaeren

José Voets

Each and every one of them has made an important contribution to our academic community. We remember them with fondness and gratitude and share the feelings of their family and friends who remain behind.

A region, any region nowadays –in this era of the knowledge economy- benefits from the presence of a university. It is not just the contribution of that university to employment or the purchasing power it generates through staff and students. But it is the contribution to the culture and to innovation in the region.

In this region the cultural contribution of the university has been widely recognized. In the relatively short time of its existence (now 28 years) the university has greatly spurred the unique combination of a rich cultural heritage with an open, modern, even sometimes cosmopolitan culture. It has made a permanent mark on the city, where nowadays century-old traditions, like the annual transfer of the city key with Carnaval or the septennially held Heiligdomsvaart, go hand in hand with the multitude of languages, which one hears when coming across the Servaas Bridge and which often are related to students, staff or visitors of the university.

The impact of the university on the region both culturally as well as economically will continue to be felt, where the university itself is taking the initiative, within the region South East Netherlands, to actively contribute to economic innovation, in line with the proposals of the Innovation Platform and the Government Memorandum: Peaks in the Delta. This region is spectacular, because of its high intensity in private research: 45% of all private research takes place here. However, this private research is not matched by public research. Despite the presence of the Technical University Eindhoven, the University of Tilburg and the Maastricht University, only 10% of public research spent is in this region, a ratio of one in almost five, while the average ratio in the Netherlands is one to less than two.

I thank my colleagues who have been effective in attractive national and European research funding to this university. They have the full support from the university board in their efforts to realize the innovative potential of our university, in particular when it comes to research where the human being and our society are in the centre of interest.

Within the South East of the Netherlands we have found excellent partners amongst others in the two multinationals DSM and Philips to support our validation of knowledge and our innovation drive. Through synergy and selectivity we can jointly have a greater impact on employment and prosperity in the region.

Our associations with the University of Hasselt within the Transnational University Limburg and with the University of Liege are ways by which the Dutch innovation drive is integrated in the Euregion. We continue to explore the opportunities for concrete cooperation with the RWTH Aachen. This Euregion has one of the highest densities of higher education and research in Europe and has to make use of it.

But the scope of Maastricht University does not end at the borders of the Euregion, nor at the borderlines of Europe. Globalization will continue to carry the Maastricht University on its wings. Globalization means that the costs of bridging distances –whether physically or in terms of getting access to information– are greatly diminished. It means that increasingly the menu of choices for potential students becomes the world's offerings of university courses – while at the same time the labor market for graduates has also become international.

Maastricht University sets the tone for quality university education in the Netherlands and will continue to do so. Problem Based Learning in small groups remains to be our trademark also for masterclasses. Being first or belonging to the top is the command for each and every one of the studies offered. The Europe-wide introduction of the Bachelor-Master structure provides new opportunities, namely to attract students from other universities (national and international) for the master stage. The comparative advantage of Maastricht is at least threefold:

- the nationally and internationally well known high quality of teaching;
- the use of the English language in teaching;
- excellent employment prospects for its alumni as is borne out by ROA data.

Maar laat ik daarmee meteen -en nu in het Nederlands- het volgende daaraan toevoegen: De Universiteit Maastricht heeft net als alle andere Nederlandse universiteiten, met drie grote, specifieke Nederlandse, nadelen te maken bij het werven van buitenlandse studenten:

- de collegegelden zijn in Nederland (na het Verenigd Koninkrijk) de hoogste van Europa;
- de studieduur van de masters degree is vrijwel overal in Europa twee jaar, terwijl in Nederland bij een groot aantal masters opleidingen van een- jarigheid moet worden uitgegaan:
- voor niet-EU-studenten heeft Frans Timmermans al aangegeven dat ons vreemdelingenbeleid wurgend is voor het aantrekken van studenten van buiten de EU

Europa blijft een lokroep die ons aantrekt. “De natie staat heeft haar macht verloren om welvaart en zekerheid te scheppen voor haar burgers, tenzij ze het zoekt in succesvolle

internationale verbindingen”, zei de onlangs voorgedragen Britse Eurocommissaris, Peter Mandelson in de Den Uyl lezing op 16 maart 2004. Europeanising –niet hetzelfde overigens als homogenisering – is de sleutel naar nieuwe culturele, sociale en economische impulsen. Des te teleurstellender is het om te zien dat onderwijs niet een onderdeel is van het Europese Unie debat of de wetgeving: onderwijs en cultuur zijn de enige twee sectoren, die volledig buiten elk unieverdrag zijn gehouden. Voor de Nederlandse universiteiten die zich internationaal opstellen is het van het allergrootste belang om tot een betere Europese coördinatie van het hoger onderwijsbeleid te komen. Onze ervaringen met de tUL hebben ons juist geleerd, dat de verschillen in nationale wetgevingen een belangrijk struikelblok zijn voor internationale samenwerking van universiteiten. Zou het Nederlandse voorzitterschap van de Europese Unie dit wellicht kunnen agenderen voor de Europese Unie? Kan diezelfde regering wellicht “out of the box” denken en daarbij betrekken dat een Europese OV kaart voor studenten wenselijk zou zijn.

Bij dit begin van het Academisch Jaar is er alle reden om met optimisme vooruit te kijken. Optimisme over de inzet van staf en studenten om maximaal hun idealen te realiseren in een cultuur van ambitie, respect en van open debat. Optimisme over het realiseren van de daadwerkelijke voordelen van samenwerking met het Academisch Ziekenhuis in het MUCH proces. Optimisme over de start van een School of Governance. Optimisme over de vruchten van samenwerking in en buiten de regio met universiteiten en bedrijven.

De uitdagingen zijn ook groot:

- de masteropleidingen moeten zich het komend jaar bewijzen en aantrekkelijk blijken voor grote groepen studenten van binnen de UM en daarbuiten;
- het aandeel vrouwelijke hoogleraren moet omhoog; het is een van de laagste in Nederland, dat – als land – olympisch ook al geen medailles zou halen;
- we willen behoren tot de top drie van Nederland en de top tien van Europa, zowel in onderwijs als in onderzoek. Dat is een ambitie die alleen met veel inspanning en zorgvuldig beleid gerealiseerd zal kunnen worden.
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De eerder geciteerde Peter Mandelson zei in dezelfde Den Uyl lezing dat politici zich niet kunnen permitteren om pessimistisch te zijn. De Universiteit Maastricht meent zich te kunnen permitteren optimistisch te zijn omdat ze het in huis heeft, omdat ze in de afgelopen 28 jaar zo’n geweldig “track record” heeft opgebouwd.

Ich möchte Herrn Dr. Kohl, Altbundeskanzler Deutschlands, sehr herzlich danken für seine vortreffliche Rede zu Beginn des akademischen Jahres an der Universität Maastricht.

Ik dank parlamentslid Frans Timmermans voor zijn woorden, Johan Hulshof voor zijn inbreng, Philip Frederiks voor een bijzondere rol, die met verve werd vervuld. Ik dank u allen voor uw aanwezigheid en belangstelling en nodig u van harte uit voor de receptie die in de aangrenzende ruimte, het Trajectum gehouden wordt.